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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000568

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: RESPONSE RE: GOT INVITATIONS TO SADR, MUTLAK, AND
JAFARI

REF: A. ANKARA 721
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 517
[1](#)C. KIRKUK 251
[1](#)D. KIRKUK 21
[1](#)E. STATE 27111

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Reftel A requests Embassy Baghdad's views on invitations by the Government of Turkey to Iraqi political leaders. As we have reported, it is not yet certain that current Prime Minister Jafari will retain his position; there are a flurry of discussions underway in Baghdad. Although it seems unlikely that Jafari would leave Iraq to visit Turkey amid these talks, we do not object to the Turks hosting him in principle. Indeed, his leaving the country might make it easier to bring the talks to a close with a compromise candidate. Embassy Baghdad, however, strongly discourages the Turks from inviting Muqtada Sadr, who remains tied to acts of violence and intimidation and is not the political statesman he tries to portray. Salih Mutlak is not tied directly to acts of violence, but his public statements frequently are unhelpful. As he would likely use his meetings in Ankara to boost his credibility, we do not think the Turks receiving him now will be particularly useful. The Kurdish Islamic Union (KIU) has joined the broader Kurdish Alliance and is playing by democratic rules. We therefore see no problem with the Turks receiving the KIU. Embassy recommends that the invitation for PM Jafari be delayed until there is certainty on who will form the next Iraqi government. END SUMMARY.

IBRAHIM JAFARI: Not Yet a Lock

[1](#)2. (C) As we have reported, intense discussions are underway about the prime ministership. Since it is not clear that the controversial Ibrahim Jafari will retain the position, we doubt that he would leave Baghdad in the middle of these talks. However, his departure for Turkey might help those who are operating quietly to remove Jafari as PM and open the way for a final deal that achieves the unity government we seek. Furthermore, a Jafari trip to Turkey could further strengthen the resolve of Kurdish leaders to back another Shia Coalition figure for the premiership. It is also possible that the Turks could use the opportunity to convince Jafari to raise his standing with Sunni Arabs on issues vital to Sunnis -- such as the selection of the Interior Minister.

MUQTADA AL-SADR: A Divisive Influence

13. (C) Muqtada al-Sadr is a divisive influence in Iraqi politics and should not be invited by the GOT. Sadr's militia, the Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM), has fought MNF-I twice, causing U.S. and Iraqi casualties. Armed groups connected to the JAM continue to attack Coalition Force (CF) targets, especially in southern Iraq. In addition, JAM groups have been implicated in extra-judicial killings of Sunni Arabs and other murders and intimidation in Baghdad and the Shia heartland of Iraq. Sadr has never renounced what the JAM is doing. Indeed, in his recent trips throughout the region he has said that, if the U.S. attacks Iran or Syria, JAM would fight U.S. forces once again to help defend these Islamic countries.

14. (C) Sadr likes to portray himself as a defender of Islam, and his regional travel thus far has given him a forum to proclaim his views to the Arab street. Meanwhile, in his stronghold of Sadr City, we have confirmed the existence of extra-legal sharia courts, which Sadrist elements use to harass and threaten Iraqi citizens. Sadr supported the same kind of sharia courts in Najaf prior to being forced out of the city by CF action in September 2004. He has never denounced the killings committed by the Najaf sharia court (which CF and Iraqi authorities documented). Instead, despite fellow Sadrist claims to the contrary (reftel), he accepts and promotes such courts and his militia as elements of an extremist state within Iraq.

15. (C) Post therefore shares Ref E's view that receiving Sadr sends a distorted message. Sadr keeps one foot in the political process and one in the camp of armed resistance, and such straddling cannot be accepted as a pass to international legitimacy when Iraq has a democratically elected government. The USG seeks to limit his exposure and

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influence and would not support providing Sadr with the increased stature that an official visit to Ankara would bring. Any GOT contacts with Sadr should be avoided. Any contacts that occur should be crafted so as not to increase his perceived legitimacy and should include a blunt message about his destabilizing role.

SALIH MUTLAK: Unworthy Interlocutor

16. (C) Salih Mutlak, whose coalition won eleven seats in the December election, may retain control of a few seats as the next parliament assembles to vote on the Presidency Council (and the PM as part of the package). As we encourage the formation of a unity government, Mutlak and his small group of supporters need to be inside the Sunni Arab-Allawi-Kurdish group negotiating with the Shia Islamist Coalition. His defection separately to the Shia Islamists would make achieving a balanced unity government more difficult. If the Turks can convince him to avoid cutting a separate deal, then his visit to Ankara might be useful.

17. (C) However, Mutlak repeatedly has made statements that encourage Sunni Arab hard-liners and foster sentiment against the presence of Coalition Forces in Iraq. Last month he told a major Arabic daily that he supports the Iraqi resistance -- a remark that immediately drew the ire of the Shia. Most recently, on February 17, Mutlaq publicly stated, "It is time for the occupier to leave our land immediately." He said this even while privately telling us that he supports a continued Coalition presence in Iraq -- a two-faced approach that exceeds the boundaries of even Iraqi political behavior. At his worst, Mutlak is a potentially dangerous demagogue who is only interested in securing a government position for himself. At his more benign, he is increasingly discounted even by his own supporters. If the Turks receive Mutlak, they must deliver a stern message about his public remarks and the importance of fostering reconciliation, not extremism.

KIU: Now Part of the Kurdish Alliance

18. (C) Post has no objection to the GOT inviting KIU leaders to visit Ankara. The KIU, which recently agreed to join the Kurdistan Alliance, has a record of being the third-party choice for many disaffected Kurds in the North. Its relations with the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in particular are strained, and the GOT can expect that an invitation to the KIU will raise more than passing interest among KDP leadership. Although an Islamic party, the KIU repeatedly has stressed to U.S. interlocutors its commitment to separating religion from politics and its adherence to the principles of the constitution. Moreover, the KIU appears to be a peaceful party, without a quasi-militia force such as the peshmerga. The KIU, however, is seeking significant political spoils in return for merging with the Kurdistan Alliance (reftels C and D).

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